Family Pluralistic Communication Pattern and the Lifestyle of the Ibibio of Akwa Ibom State: A Socio -Religious Approach

By

Okon, Samuel Edet
Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,
Faculty of Humanities Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State
Phone Number: 08026208531
Email Address: samuelokon18@gmail.com

&

Agha Eresia-Eke
Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities,
Rivers State University, Rivers State
Phone Number: 08033412781

Abstract

A communication system is an autopoietic system that (re)produces everything that functions as a unity for the system through the system itself. Of course, this can occur only in an environment and depending on environmental restrictions. The type of communication pattern used in a particular family can go a long way to ascertaining what individual member of that family feel or think about other religions or even about same religion with different faiths. One type of communication pattern that can possibly be found in the family, among others, is the pluralistic communication pattern. This study made use of the family communication patterns theory by Mcleod. and Chaffee (1973). McLeod and Chaffee developed the original model of family communication patterns to describe families' tendencies to develop fairly stable and predictable ways of communicating with one another. This theory states that families high in conversation orientation and low in conformity orientation are labeled pluralistic. Communication in pluralistic families is characterized by open, unconstrained discussions that involve all family members and a wide range of topics. when people are unaware of changing their attitudes, others' communications may induce subtle shifts in related cognitions. Because communication and persuasion play such a

prominent role in human life and culture, it is a scholarly topic of immense complexity and breadth. Scholars have often been interested in understanding persuasion in hopes of improving human welfare and of reducing wars and conflicts. Religious belonging may moderate the relationship between the institution and the individual in the religious realm, but it is very likely that this belonging is constitutive only in the case of religious minorities. The findings on the influence of pluralistic communication pattern on the members' attitude on religious heterogeneity show that pluralistic communication pattern has a positive influence on members' attitude to religious heterogeneity From the information gathered, it can be said that pluralistic communication pattern does a lot to do with tolerance.

Keywords: Communication, Communication Pattern, Pluralistic Communication Pattern, Pluralistic Families, Attitude, Religious Heterogeneity

Introduction

A communication system is a completely closed system that creates the components out of which it arises through communication itself. In this sense a communication system is an autopoietic system that (re)produces everything that functions as a unity for the system through the system itself. Of course, this can occur only in an environment and depending on environmental restrictions. Formulated more concretely, this means that the communication system itself specifies not only its elements, whatever the ultimate units of communication are- but also its structures. What is not communicated cannot contribute anything to it. Only communication can influence communication. Only communication can break down the units of communication (e.g., analyse the selective horizon of information or seek the reasons for an utterance). And only communication can control and repair communication. As can readily be seen, the practice of carrying out such reflexive operations is extraordinarily demanding and is restricted by the characteristics of the autopoiesis of communication.

Communication style according to Nzekwe (2013) refers to the various strategies including verbal, nonverbal and caring approaches which teachers employ to make learners understand their instructions effectively. The type of communication pattern used in a particular family can go a long way to

ascertaining what individual member of that family feel or think about other religions or even about same religion with different faiths. One type of communication pattern that can possibly be found in the family, among others, is the pluralistic communication pattern. The pluralistic communication pattern is a type of communication pattern there is. The pluralistic communication pattern deals with a situation where a pluralistic family is high in conversation orientation and low in conformity. Open discussion is encouraged for all family members, and parents do not strive to control their children's or each other's behaviours or decision. According to Rueter and Koerner (2008), pluralistic families are low in conformity orientation and high in conversation orientation. Pluralistic families encourage communication but value individual autonomy and respect for different opinions. This means that individuals are allowed to decide, on their own, whatever path they chose to follow. Each member of this family has the right to either follow whatever religious beliefs they chose, or still follow the traditional religion of the family.

Heterogeneity is a word that signifies diversity. A classroom consisting of people from lots of different backgrounds would be considered having a quality of heterogeneity. Heterogeneity is often used in contrast to homogeneity, which is when two or more people or things are alike. Religious heterogeneity or religious pluralism presents challenges for families who may have different beliefs within the same household. To this end, one can also say that religious heterogeneity is a situation whereby there is diversity within religious traditions, and in a situation whereby such situations are not put in check, can lead to religious conflict of some sort. The type of communication pattern used in a particular family can determine the type of attitude a person can have towards religious heterogeneity- other religions or religious Faith. To this end, this study aims at looking at how pluralistic communication pattern in the family can influence or check various conflict situations within a particular religion or between two or more religions.

Theoretical Framework

This study made use of the family communication patterns theory by Mcleod J. M. and Chaffee S. H. (1972, 1973). McLeod and Chaffee developed the original model of family communication patterns to describe families' tendencies to develop fairly stable and predictable ways of communicating with one another. As mass media

researchers, McLeod and Chaffee were not interested in family communication as an end in itself. Rather, they wanted to explain how families create and share social reality. Specifically, they were interested in explaining how parents socialise their children to process information stemming from outside the family; in particular, information in the form of mass media messages. At that time, psychology and allied fields experienced a renewed interest in cognitive processes as they turned away from behaviorism and an almost exclusive interest in message properties to explain communication outcomes.

Thus, it is no surprise that McLeod and Chaffee based their explanation of family communication on the cognitive theory of co-orientation. Co-orientation is one of the fundamental concepts of social cognition initially described by Heider (1958) and Newcomb (1953) and refers to two or more persons focusing on and evaluating the same object in their social or material environment. In dyad of families that are aware of their shared focus, co-orientation leads to two different cognitions for each person. The first cognition is a person's own evaluation of the object and the second cognition is the person's perception of the other persons' evaluation of the object. Combined, these cognitions determine three attributes of co-orientation: agreement, accuracy, and congruence. Agreement refers to equivalence of the two persons' evaluations of the object. For example, if Chris and Pat are co-oriented toward a movie and they both like the movie, they have agreement.

The psychological desire for balanced cognition and the pragmatic need to understand the other; however, favor congruence and accuracy, respectively; and because of the linear dependency of congruence, accuracy, and agreement, ultimately also agreement (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2004). Because of this, co-orientation in dyads and families usually leads to shared social reality (for a detailed explanation of these processes (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2004).

McLeod and Chaffee (1972) proposed that families vary in their preferences for and uses of these two strategies to achieve agreement, and consequently children are socialized differently in regard to the processing of information contained in media messages. Children of families that tend to use socio-orientation rely on others to interpret the meaning of media messages to them, mainly their parents

or peers. Conversely, children of families that tend to use concept-orientation elaborate on the concepts and ideas contained in the messages to determine their meanings. In other words, the two strategies to achieve agreement in families are associated with different communication behaviors.

In the context of this study, the theory is used to show that different families maintain certain patterns of communication. It shows that family communication patterns are the ways that members of a family interact. These patterns develop over time, and sometimes passed on to the next generations. It shows that family communication patterns are important because they translate into how people communicate everywhere. It is important to be aware of one's reactions and impulses when interacting with others.

This theory states that families high in conversation orientation and low in conformity orientation are labeled pluralistic. Communication in pluralistic families is characterized by open, unconstrained discussions that involve all family members and a wide range of topics. Parents in these families do not feel the need to be in control of their children by making decisions for them, nor do they feel the need to agree with their children's decisions. This parental attitude leads to family discussions in which opinions are evaluated based on the merit of arguments in their support rather than on which family members espouse them.

The Concept of Family Pluralistic Communication Pattern

Families high in conversation orientation and low in conformity orientation are labeled pluralistic. Communication in pluralistic families is characterized by open, unconstrained discussions that involve all family members and a wide range of topics. Parents in these families do not feel the need to be in control of their children by making decisions for them, nor do they feel the need to agree with their children's decisions. This parental attitude leads to family discussions in which opinions are evaluated based on the merit of arguments in their support rather than on which family members espouse them. That is, parents are willing to accept their children's opinions and allow them to participate in family decision making.

Because of their emphasis on the free exchange of ideas and the absence of overt pressure to conform or to obey, these families are low in conflict avoidance and openly address their conflicts with one another, engage in positive conflict-resolution strategies, and usually are able to resolve their conflicts. Children of these families learn to value family conversations and learn to be independent and autonomous at the same time, which fosters their communication competence and their confidence in their ability to make their own decisions (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 1997).

A pluralistic type of family communication relies on high levels of conversation with low levels of conformity. With pluralistic kinds, there is a significant level of openness in dialogue. Conversation leads to the conflict styles of collaborating and compromising. In this type, every member of the family is valued equally and there is no single authority figure that gets the final say (Albritton, 2023). With conversation, but without conformity, families have open conversations with every member having equal opportunities for input when the family unit makes a decision together.

The pluralistic family, also encourages communication and expression of ideas, but does not exert pressure on a child to comply with parental ideas. Pluralistic family communication patterns have been associated with higher levels of religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue (Sherkat and Ellison, 2009). Pluralistic families value individual autonomy and respect for different opinions, which may facilitate communication and understanding between people of different religions.

Parents in pluralistic families encourage individualism in their children and facilitate the child's endeavors. In contrast with the two preceding family types, communication is less prevalent in the remaining two types. Children from pluralistic families use collaborating/integrating and compromising styles, and pluralistic families are least conflict avoidant (Lertsuwan, 2018). Pluralistic families are high in conversation but low in conformity (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002). Parents within this pattern allow and encourage children to make rational decisions; therefore, these children are influenced by rational argument (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002).

Specifically, individuals in colleges from pluralistic families were found to adjust more easily to college life due to the lack of resentment towards parents and higher conflictual independence (Orrego and Rodriguez, 2001). In addition to college adjustment positively correlating to conversation orientation in families, students' willingness to communicate also correlates to this axis of FCP (Orrego and Rodriguez, 2001). In furtherance to this, students who grow up in an environment that encourages the sharing of ideas and conversation find communication more rewarding in settings and interactions outside the home (Hillon, 2020).

Communication and Attitude

Human life is replete with communications that have persuasive intent and seemingly always has been. Biblical Eve fell prey to the serpent's arguments to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and then convinced Adam to follow suit (Genesis 3:1-6, KJV). Modern politicians persuade voters to support them. Advertisers target mass-market segments who will buy their products. Spammers send the masses unrelenting barrages of unwanted promotions. In science, scholars craft their manuscripts' arguments to induce acceptance of their reported evidence on the topic.

These examples merely touch the surface of communication and attitude change. Lest they lead to the misconceptions that communication and attitude change are solely human affairs, it is important to note that the phenomenon appears in varying levels of sophistication across species, but especially in those that are social in nature. The great apes persuade through gestures and vocalizations. Even bees communicate and induce behavior change in other bees, though it may be doubtful whether attitudes mediate this relation. In humans, messages may meet with responses ranging from enthusiastic embrace to vehement resistance (Johnson and Maio, 2016).

Even when people are unaware of changing their attitudes, others' communications may induce subtle shifts in related cognitions. Because communication and persuasion play such a prominent role in human life and culture, it is a scholarly topic of immense complexity and breadth. Scholars have often been interested in understanding persuasion in hopes of improving human

welfare and of reducing wars and conflicts. Yet, while it is tempting to think of communication and persuasion as serving higher aims, like any technology, such tools can serve many ill aims. One of the most infamous uses of persuasion knowledge was Hitler's propaganda ministry in Nazi Germany, which successfully solicited the tacit or explicit support of a majority behind the government's goals to seek a "permanent solution" to the presence of "undesirables" or "inferiors" in their country (Sternberg, 2003).

The Holocaust bears witness to the power of persuasion: Orchestrated with other public events, deliberate mass communication campaigns sought and succeeded in this goal until Germany surrendered to the Allies. Ironically, the perception that people can so easily be swayed by such propaganda added fuel to the fire of communication researchers, who responded by further studying the processes by which such effects occur. Significant advances in knowledge of communication and persuasion came on the heels of one of history's great atrocities. Although attitudes have been both a phenomenon and a scholarly interest since Antiquity, systematic scientific knowledge did not accrue until the 20th century (McGuire, 1985).

Religious Heterogeneity

While religious heterogeneity is a concept that has been used in the study of atheism for some time (LeDrew 2013; Lim,2010), it is increasingly being used in both the analysis of diversity within religious traditions (Markovits and Garner 2020; Tolstaya 2020) and the discourse of religious education (Büttner,2018; Grümme 2017; Lindner and Tautz 2018). Many aspects of religious heterogeneity can be explained by the sociological concepts of secularization, individualization, or pluralization (Pickel 2010; Taylor 2007). All these concepts, for example, lead to the same conclusion, which is that the bond between religious institutions and the individual is loosening. On a macro level, various worldviews have emerged alongside Christianity, and there is no evidence as to which worldview would serve best to cope with life.

On a meso level, religious institutions are a legitimate player in civil society but have lost their power to dominate the discourse of this society. On the micro level, religious communities have lost their power to shape their adherents' life. There

is, however, still research needed to precisely predict the various intensities of religious commitment in an individual's relationship with their religious community. Can religious commitment, for example, be predicted by the character of the religious community one belongs to? Is it individual characteristics that moderate that commitment? Or is it the social environment in which one has been brought up or is living in today, respectively? This paper addresses these questions. For this purpose, it first describes the state of the art regarding research in religious commitment, and then it delineates the methods of the present study, maps its results, and discusses the latter.

Often, the relationship between religious institutions and individuals has been conceptualized by religious belonging (Fukuyama 2018; Liedhegener 2016). The fact that an individual is Christian, Muslim, Jewish etc., has been taken as an indicator of the relationship between the institution and the individual. The underlying theory is that, when a person has been raised in a Christian, Muslim, Jewish, etc., environment, their individual worldview is structured according to the doctrine and practice of the relevant religious tradition. In consequence; the individual will develop a collective identity that is—more or less—in line with the relevant institution's ideals and convictions. On the one hand, the modern condition of Western society undermines this theory by the processes outlined in the previous paragraph. Grace Davie's formula of "believing without belonging" became iconic in this regard (Davie, 1994).

On the other hand, individuals from religious minorities, in particular, often take their religious belonging as the backbone of their identity (Pickel, 2020; Timol 2020). Sharing the same religious background creates a space of conformity in a culturally antagonistic social surrounding- often even when the way in which this background is practiced in everyday life varies remarkably. In this regard, religious belonging is a suitable identity marker for religious minorities, even in a Christian surrounding as indicated by the case of Northern Ireland (Mitchell, 2005). All in all, religious belonging may moderate the relationship between the institution and the individual in the religious realm, but it is very likely that this belonging is constitutive only in the case of religious minorities. As a general approach to the relationship between the religious institution and the individual

in modern Western society, religious belonging has lost much of its exploratory power.

Effect of Family Pluralistic Communication Pattern on the Attitudes of Members on Religious Heterogeneity

According to a study by Effiong and Usoroh (2020), findings revealed that families that adopt pluralistic family communication pattern experience high level of cohesion which is enmeshed between adolescents and parents. The findings may be attributed to the fact that pluralistic communication pattern tend to allow a very open communication and discussion of ideas between adolescents and parents with little emphasis on social constraints. More so, pluralistic communications pattern encourage the development and expression of autonomous opinions and ideas for balanced family system as adolescents are encouraged to express their feelings, hopes and plans as well as make contributions to the wellbeing of the family.

Their findings also agreed with the findings of Thakkar and Sheth (2014) who in their study observed that, youngsters are more comfortable in discussing about civic and political matters and about business more with fathers, and personal fears and failures with mothers but, find it is difficult to discuss on some sensitive matters like choice of friends and personal habits. Based on the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that family communication patterns have significantly relationship on cohesion between adolescents and parents in secondary schools in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Therefore, cohesion between adolescents and parents for a balanced family system could be maintained if the appropriate communication pattern is appropriated among the members concerned. Communication patterns, like the pluralistic, determine the level of cohesion between adolescents and parents.

The findings on the influence of pluralistic communication pattern on the members' attitude on religious heterogeneity show that pluralistic communication pattern has a positive influence on members' attitude to religious heterogeneity From the information gathered, it can be said that pluralistic communication pattern does a lot to do with tolerance. This is in line with Sherkat and Ellison (2009) who posit that pluralistic family communication pattern have been

associated with higher levels of religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue. Also, Lertsuwan (2018) reports that children from pluralistic families use collaborating/integrating and compromising styles, and such families are least conflict avoidant.

Conclusion

Some criteria usually discussed are about family functions and family interactions. Family functions are about the orientation of tasks performed and expected family accomplishments, while the problem of interaction is related to the communication process that connects individuals as family members. Besides that, the family has a duty in the maintenance and outreach for their children, which is seen as the most important in strengthening of family functions. Through family interactions, parents can convey to their children about various knowledge on the challenges the family is facing at the moment, or even the setbacks that have been there before the children were born. This process includes maintenance and socialization in a particular system of values and beliefs. One place where family communication can have a strong influence is one about religion and religious beliefs.

Among other things, family communication patterns influence adult children's perceptions of certain issues. For instance, once a child has left the family, as a young adult the communication patterns that existed within that family still influences that young adult's behavior. It is pertinent, however, that parents allow their children to be exposed to other communication patters there are, and not just the pluralistic; and if possible, make them see the need to respect the choices and decisions of others, especially with regards to religious heterogeneity.

References

Büttner, G., Mendl, H., Reis, O. and Roose, H. (eds.) (2018). *Heterogenität im Klassenzimmer. Heidelberg*: Verlag LUS

Davie, G. (1994). *Religion in Britain since 1945: believing without belonging. Making contemporary Britain*. Blackwell.

Fitzpatrick, M. A. and Koerner, A. (1997). *Family communication schemata: effects on children's resiliency.* In H. McCubbin (Ed.), Promoting resiliency in families

and children at risk: interdisciplinary perspectives (pp. 1-24). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fukuyama, F. (2018). *Identity: contemporary identity politics and the struggle for recognition*. Profile Books

Grümme, B. (2017). *Heterogenität in der religionspädagogik: grundlagen und konkrete Bausteine*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder.

Gudykunst, W. B. and Lee, C. M. (2003). *Cross cultural communication theories.* In W. B.

Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*: Wiley

Hillon, C. L. (2020). *The parent influence: The relationship among family communication patterns, student financial literacy, and college choice*. https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/5654 (Retrieved on 10th January, 2023).

Johnson, B. T. and Maio, G. R. (2016). *Communication and attitude change: causes, processes, and effects* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232476948 (Retrieved on 10th January, 2023).

Koerner, A. F. and Fitzpatrick, M. A. (2002a). Understanding family communication patterns and family functioning: The roles of conversation orientation and conformity orientation. *Communication Year Book*, 28, 36-68.

Koerner, A. F. and Fitzpatrick, M. A. (2002b). Toward a theory of family communication. *Communication Theory*, 12: 70-91.

Koerner, A. F. and Fitzpatrick, M. A. (2004). *Communication in intact families*. In A. L. Vangelisti (Ed.), The Handbook of family communication (pp. 177-195). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

LeDrew, S. (2013). Discovering atheism: Heterogeneity in trajectories to atheist identity and activism. *Sociology of Religion*, 74: 431–53.

Lertsuwan, B. (2018). *Family communication patterns and conflict management styles young adults use with their parents in Chiang Mai, Thailand*. https://www (Retrieved on 10th January, 2023).

Liedhegener, A. (2016). *Religiöse identitäten als problem wechselseitiger identifizierungen und kategorisierungen. aktuelle theoretische konzepte und fragen ihrer operationalisierung in der empirischen religionsforschung*. In Religiöse Identitäten in Politischen Konflikten. Edited by Ines-Jacqueline Werkner and Oliver Hidalgo. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, pp. 65–82.

Lim, C., MacGregor, C. A. and Putnam, R. D. (2010). Secular and liminal: Discovering heterogeneity among religious nones. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 49: 596–618.

Lindner, H. and Tautz, M. (eds.) (2018). *Heterogenität und inklusion: Herausforderungen für die religionspädagogik*. Münster: Lit

Lin, Y., Durbin, J. M. and Rancer, A. S. (2016). Perceived instructor argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, and classroom communication climate in relation to student state motivation and math anxiety. *Communication Education*, 66 (3): 330-349. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.201 6.1245427

Markovits, A. S. and Garner, K. (2020). The pluralism of Jewish identity among students at the University of Michigan, 1897–1945: An apt microcosm of American Jewry's cultural heterogeneity and diverse identity. *Zeitschrift Für Religion, Gesellschaft und Politik*, 4: 263–88.

McLeod, J.M. and Chaffee, S. H. (1973). Interpersonal approaches to communication research. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 16: 469-499

McGuire, W. J. (1985). *Attitudes and attitude change*. In G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (Eds.), Handbook of Social Psychology (3rd ed., Vol. 2, pp. 233–346). New York: Random House.

Mitchell, C. (2005). Behind the ethnic marker: Religion and social identification in Northern Ireland. *Sociology of Religion*, 66: 3.

Newcomb, T. M. (1953). An approach to the study of communicative acts. *Psychological Review*, 60, 393-404.

Nzekwe, C.I. (2013) Influence of teachers' communication styles on pupils' self-esteem and achievement in Enugu State Nigeria. *Unpublished M. Ed Dissertation, University of Nigeria, Nzukka*.

Orrego, V. O., & Rodriguez, J. (2001). Family communication patterns and college adjustment: The effects of communication and conflictual independence on college students. *The Journal of Family Communication*, 1, 175-189. doi:10.1207/ S15327698JFC0103_02

Pickel, G. (2010). Sakularisierung, individualisierung oder marktmodell? religiosität und ihre erklärungsfaktoren im europäischen Vergleich. *Kölner Zeitschrift Für Soziologie Und Sozialpsychologie*, 62: 219–45.

Reuter, M.A. and Koerner, A. F. (2008).The effects of family communication patterns on adopted adolescent adjustment. *Journal of Manage and Family*, 70: 715-727.

Sternberg, R. J. (2003). A Duplex theory of hate: development and application to terrorism, massacres, and genocide. *Review of General Psychology*, 7: 299–328.

Talbot, D. A. (1915). *Women Mysteries of Primitive People*. NP

Taylor, C. (2007). *A secular age*: Harvard University Press.

Tolstaya, K. (2020). Orthodox kaleidoscope: heterogeneity, complexity, and dynamics in the Russian Orthodox Church. an introduction. *Religion, State and Society*, 48: 80–89.

Turkmen, K. and Yildiz, M. (2019). A study of multidimentional submissiveness scale. *Dini Arastirmalar*, 22 (56): 285-306.